



apuntes

Reflexiones teológicas desde el contexto Hispano-Latino

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Aquiles Ernesto Martinez

Book Reviews

Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez

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Apuntes

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From the Editor

Recently, the editorial board and staff for *Apuntes* has been working together to make some needed improvements to the journal. As most of you know, *Apuntes* is the oldest journal of Latino/a theology in continued publication. Recently, we have been working with new publication software that will improve the quality of the publication and make the publication process easier. In addition, one of our most valuable staff members, Ella Luna, is leaving to engage in full time studies. Throughout all of these transitions, there will be some inevitable delays in the publication schedules and in getting issues to our subscribers. For that, we apologize in advance. However, we hope that as we make these changes, *Apuntes*, will continue to serve its readers, as it has in years past, by bringing you insights and theological reflections from the margins. Thus, we continue to stand at the crossroads of theological reflections—where theology, church, and culture meet.

In this issue, Dr. Aquiles Martínez, who teaches at Reinhardt College and is a frequent contributor to our journal, provides us with an insightful and timely study of Romans 13:1-7, with a view to the topic of immigration and the misapplication of scripture to many current political arguments. Given current tendencies to target immigration as a escape goat for deeper and more sinister societal problems, those who exist at the fringes of society and are marginalized by unjust immigration laws are bearing the violent brunt of biased social attitudes and systemic oppression. As theologians, it is our prophetic calling to take a stand for those whose voices are muted and gagged. In addition to this essay, there are also three book reviews written by Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez, Alberto Garcia, and Pablo R. Caraballo-Rodríguez.

The Immigration Controversy and Romans 13:1-7

Aquiles Ernesto Martínez

Christians are split on the issue of illegal immigration. Even more disheartening has been the lack of serious involvement contrasted by a thoughtless defense of our laws through biblical proof-texting, particularly Romans 13:1-7. The prevailing rhetoric against “illegal migration” has been a mind-boggling blend of political conservatism, nationalism, economic interests, and religion along with poor biblical and societal analysis. More formal positions have made pleas for charity, border control, and law enforcement but with no prophetic stance. The latest resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention is a prime example of it.¹

For Christians who see laws as a “pure” manifestation of “the will of God,” submission to earthly authorities is of primary concern. Based on a nationalistic and literalistic reading of Romans 13:1-7, they contend that the state must punish evildoers and reward those who comply, for earthly authorities are God’s servants appointed to do justice. Good law-abiding citizens must not fear sanctions, only those who break the laws. Consequently, as part of their moral duties, all Christians must obey the law instead of condoning law-breaking conduct. This means that both “illegal employers” and “illegal immigrants” must be held accountable and that illegal immigration must be stopped. Violating immigration laws means violating the laws

¹ See the document “On The Crisis Of Illegal Immigration” (Greensboro, North Carolina, June 13-14, 2006).

created by people whom God put in place. We must not, then, be accomplices of lawlessness.

As reasonable as this position might seem, its lack of societal analysis is as evident as its mishandling of Romans 13:1-7. Applying these seven verses to any contemporary situation disregarding the gaps they have and the questions they raise is naïve, ethically irresponsible, and politically suspect. This situation is worsened when the complexities of our own context are overlooked. An insightful dialogue with passages like Romans 13:1-7 in light of our own historicity is crucial. And yet this cannot occur unless we conduct a solid exegesis of this text and an exegesis of our society, and bring these two exegeses in a mutual exchange of ideas. The present article, then, takes us through this three-dimensional journey in order to bring to the fore a series of issues associated with the government, its laws, and the immigration debate. Some hermeneutical considerations will bring this article to a closure as a way of sensitizing our Christian communities to a more responsible decision-making process. This is what a faith seeking understanding must always pursue.

I. Literary Context.

The history of the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 is a history of enlightening. For the purposes of my reflections, however, I'd like to summarize the basic points this text contains. To achieve this, I shall briefly make a few comments on this passage's literary context, socio-rhetorical situation, authorial intent, and principal arguments.

Because Romans 13:1-7 is packed in a series of exhortative statements, the logical connections with its surroundings are loose but notable.² This passage is one more bead of a priceless necklace of

² Although it is true that this passage might be at odds with the calling not to conform to this world (12:2), the notion of love (because of its references to

exhortations to right living, all of them woven by the notion of “liturgy” as service to God (Rom 12:1-2). For Paul, right living is a holistic process that involves the body, the mind, and the will, as a path leading to discovering “God’s will.” The catalog of prescribed behaviors, with their corresponding values, rationales, sanctions, and practical guidelines, is long and encompasses several areas of Christian praxis (Rom 12:3-21). Submission to the government is part of it.

There are other more specific conceptual connections. After Paul talks about how Christians must treat one another (12:9-13, cf. 16) and people outside of the church (12:14-21), it seems natural for him to address Christian responsibility towards to the government, so he digresses a little before he retakes his train of thought in 13:8.³ With respect to the previous verses, submission to earthly powers (13:1-7) is part of “the good” Christian must practice and “the evil” they must avoid (12:9, 17, 21; cf. 13:3-4); a way to give honor to those around (12:10; 13:7). If submission to earthly rulers is an affliction, Christians must rejoice in hope, exhibit patience, and pray (12:11). Instead of cursing their persecutors, they must bless them, as they rejoice and mourn with others (12:14-15). They must live in harmony and peace (12:16, 18); revenge is solely God’s prerogative not a human undertaking (12:17-20; cf. Jam 1:20). With respect to the passage that follows, obedience to earthly government through the payment of taxes

punishment), and Paul’s eschatological scope (13:11-14), I disagree with those who see this text as a parenthesis with no connection with the immediate or that it interrupts the continuity between 12:21 and 13:8. For a discussion of this, see C. E. B. Cranfield, “The Epistle to the Romans,” in *The International Critical Commentary*, J. A. Emerton, and C. E. B. Cranfield, eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 651-653; John Murray, “The Epistle to the Romans,” *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 145-146; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Romans,” *The Anchor Bible* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1993), vol. 33, 663-664.

³ La Grange quoted by Cranfield, 652.

(13:1-7) is also a form of paying our debts to the neighbors, an expression of love as taught in the Torah (13:8-10; Lev 19:18). Christians must live this way, understanding that their final salvation is at hand (13:11-14).

II. Socio-Rhetorical Situation.

Part of literature analysis involves reconstructing the historical occasion or circumstance motivating the writing of any authorial response. There are reasons that compel a writer to write the way he did in order to create a certain effect in his audience. However, discovering this piece is a daunting task. Since biblical writers are not always explicit, their documents can be hard to decode. That is why we oftentimes find ourselves drawing inferences to reconstruct the socio-rhetorical situation of any given pericope. This is the case with Romans 13:1-7.

We are not sure about what specific issue ultimately prompted Romans 13:1-7 but there are several possibilities. It is conceivable that some Roman Christians might have rebelled against the Romans or were entertaining this thought, perhaps because they now felt "free in Jesus" and that their loyalty was to be directed exclusively to the values of the kingdom of God. Joining a rebellious armed force could well have been a possibility (Acts 5:36, 37; 21:38). If this was the case, Paul might have written this text to discourage anarchy, violence, or joining revolutionary movements against Roman imperialism; revenge is God's job.⁴ Some experts claim that Paul is responding to the Jewish sedition in Rome that forced Emperor Claudius to expel them

⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 320.

(and Christians) from Rome (Acts 18:2).⁵ If this is the background of this text, Paul does not want Christians to be associated with any Jewish sedition, so he is asking for compliance instead.⁶ Some contend that the enforcement of the law is one of the means God uses to avenge people who have been victimized.⁷ When we look at vv. 6-7 closely, it is possible that Paul might have targeted those who have not paid or were not willing to pay their taxes to the Roman government as well. Not doing this was insubordination and could result in strong sanctions. Another reason is that Paul was introducing himself and his version of the Gospel to the Romans, and he did not want to give the wrong impression. Besides, he was making plans to stop in Rome on his way to Spain (Ro 15:24, 28). Therefore, his views on the role of Christians with respect to civil authorities needed to be low key.

III. Authorial Intent.

In light of the above reconstructed circumstances, Paul did not want his Roman Christian readers to resist God's political appointees, have problems of conscience in doing so, or be punished for insubordination. Taking justice into their own hands was a bad idea. Being a good Christian involves being a good citizen. This means obeying men's laws. Besides, Jesus' return and the final salvation of Christians were around the corner. Being this the case, in Romans 13:1-7 Paul is

⁵ Henry Alford, "Acts – II Corinthians," *Alford's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), vol. ii, 446; C. K. Barrett, "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," *Harper's New Testament Commentaries*, Henry Chadwick, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1987), 6-7.

⁶ Murray, 146; Fitzmyer, 662-663.

⁷ Ridderbos, 320.

asking all Christians,⁸ particularly those who live in Rome, “to put themselves under” people who are “over” them or are highly placed: civil or political leaders (v. 1). This means to submit and obey “the powers that be,” particularly compliance with the established laws (v. 5).⁹ This means not rebelling against the government (v. 2), paying taxes faithfully (v. 6-7), and showing the highest respect to political leaders for the position they hold and the role they play (v. 7). This is part of what is “morally good” (v. 3-4), a way of paying our debts through love (v. 7; cf. v.8ff). This is a principle that applies to all humans and to the Romans in particular. Although Paul might have agreed that it is not an absolute duty to obey human authorities (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19-20), the exhortation here is emphatic and universal; no exceptions are made. Paul is not alluding to “the state” or “the Roman empire” specifically.¹⁰ Ideologically, this exhortation is consistent with Paul’s theology and other writers’ positions on Christian responsibility towards rulers.¹¹ Post-apostolic writers reinforced this position as well.¹²

⁸ Lit. “every soul,” which is a Hebraic idiomatic expression that refers to the individual (Fitzmyer, 665).

⁹ Paul’s words are not literally addressed to earthly rulers or civil society. I also believe that, because of the context, Paul is not making a double reference here to include earthly and spiritual authorities (cf. Cranfield, 656-659; Murray, 147; Fitzmyer, 666; Barrett, 244-245).

¹⁰ Fitzmyer, 662.

¹¹ Paul’s ideas on the nature of government and Christian civil responsibility are briefly mentioned in his letter to Titus as well (Tit 3:1). Peter teaches the same thing to his community of readers (1 Pet 2:13-14). NT churches and leaders needed instruction on this matter because, apparently, obedience to rulers created a conflict of interests among the newly, converted Christians. Freedom in Christ might have some people to question loyalty to earthly powers. However, preserving the life of the Christian movement and safeguarding the preaching of the gospel were extremely important back then. Insurrection, violence, or armed, organized rebellion would threaten this agenda. Besides, Jesus’ second coming was right around the corner.

IV. Main Arguments.

Paul supports the above contention with a series of multifaceted and interconnected arguments, which I have rearranged pedagogically.¹³ This is a mandatory step before we build a hermeneutical bridge between the world of this passage and our present reality.¹⁴

1. Drawing from a traditional understanding of God's sovereignty, Paul claims that God is "the source" of all authority, which might well cover earthly and heavenly authorities (v. 1a).¹⁵ This includes all magistrates, whom God has appointed, directly or

¹² For example, Clement of Rome (1 Clem 60.2-61.2) and Polycarp of Smirna (Mart Pol 10.2) (Fitzmyer, 666-667).

¹³ Because Paul uses γάρ seven times (in its causal and explanatory functions), I have decided to disentangle this passage and present Paul's arguments pedagogically.

¹⁴ In my book, *Después de Damasco: El Apóstol Pablo desde una Perspectiva Latina* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), I make several observations about Paul's views on the government, Christian responsibilities, and contemporary applications, particularly to Latino communities.

¹⁵ Paul's theology echoes Jesus' idea about the origin of all earthly authority as well (John 19:11). Even Satan's authority is given by God (Luke 4:6). This concept, however, is not Jesus'. It is rooted in a Jewish understanding of God's absolute sovereignty (2 Sam 12:8; Prov 8:15; Jer 27:5-6; Isa 45:1; Dan 2:21, 37; 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21; Sir 4:27; Wis 6:3; 1 Enoch 46:5).

indirectly (v. 1b).¹⁶ This means that God “causes” or “allows” for all political powers to exist and, since Paul introduces no qualifications here, we suppose that this principle applies to all regimes. He does not even mention the Roman government explicitly, perhaps out of prudence.

Inasmuch as God is the originator of all authorities, offering resistance or rebelling against any form of them means going against what God has established (v. 2a),¹⁷ and people who oppose the government will bring judgment upon themselves (v. 2b). They will be guilty, breaking the law and going against God’s will. However, civil authorities are not God. This is an important caveat, since Paul elsewhere declares that only Jesus is “Savior” and ‘Lord’ (Ro 10:9; 1 Cor 8:5-6; 1 Tim 1:17) - not the Roman Emperor or deities - and that all humans are subject to God’s judgment (Ro 1:18-32; 1 Tes 5:1-4; 2 Tes 2:1-12). Scholars speculate that Paul was not aware of the atrocities committed by the Romans and that he would have had a different opinion if he had written Romans before being incarcerated by Nero.

2. An important function of the governing authorities is to apply sanctions: to punish wrongdoers (v. 3-5), especially those who engage in subversive activities;¹⁸ and to commend those who do what is “right,” namely, those who comply.¹⁹ Although it is true that Paul’s

¹⁶ Although the second reason Paul gives in the Greek text is a causal clause coordinated with the first one, semantically, the second reason (which is more specific) appears to be part of the first one (which is broader).

¹⁷ It is not clear why Paul changes from the singular “he who rebels...” to the plural form “those who do so...”

¹⁸ Although it is possible that there might be a reference to “crimes” in general here, this does not seem to be the main focus of the passage.

focus in this passage is Christian responsibilities towards the government and not on the government itself, there are still some references to the nature and function of the state. However, this is not an exhaustive characterization. From Paul's argumentation two things are clear: First, rulers are not divine; and second, civil magistrates can and will sanction insubordination. How God brings justice through this process is not clearly defined.

3. Christians must not fear punishment if they do what is "right," namely, if they obey what civil magistrates expect. They should only fear if they deviate from its expectations expressed in laws, decrees, or ordinances (v. 3-4). The weapons they have are not ornaments, but tools to keep social order and bring evildoers to justice.²⁰ In this respect, they do not carry the sword in vain.²¹

4. Christians must submit to rulers out of their own free will and accord,²² and not because of fear of the consequences or out of self-preservation (v. 5). It has to be an act that will give no room to guilt before God later on. The internal sense of right and wrong and fear of punishment are the main motivations here. Paul does not want his readers to be accused by the conscience he previously called them to "renew" in order to know God's perfect will (12:1-2).

¹⁹ A longer theology on doing what is "good" as opposed to doing what is "bad" or taking "revenge" is articulated by Peter (1 Pet 3:13). The call to being passive and taking punishment in humility and forbearance is clear.

²⁰ This might be a reference to the dagger worn by the Caesars as a symbol of power over life and death (Alford, 447).

²¹ This could be a reference to 1) penal authority, 2) capital punishment, 3) police, 4) civil guards or those who enforce taxation (Fitzmyer, 668).

²² Alford, 446.

5. Governors are "God's servants" (v. 4; cf. Wis 6:4) or "God's ministers (public servants or officials)" (v.6).²³ They owe their position of power and privilege to God and have certain responsibilities to fulfill precisely because of their divine appointment. As God's agents, they must do what is right, punish, and collect taxes. From this perspective, one could only assume that they would comply with God's laws and execute God's will, instead of rationalizing abuses.

6. According to Paul, Christians in Rome are paying taxes and must continue to do so since God has appointed the political leaders to this very purpose.²⁴ In the flow of thoughts, this seems to be an example of submission (v. 6-7). But this teaching is not unique to Paul; it reinforces Jesus' "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25). By "taxes," Paul means tribute paid to a foreign ruler (Luke 20:22; 23:2), levied on persons and their property; "revenue" refers to toll or customs duties (Matt 10:3), and "respect" is holding a person in authority in the highest esteem (cf. 1 Peter 2:17).²⁵ Back in those days, taxes were high and many times tax collectors abused their power to demand more money than legally required.²⁶ One then could only assume that taxes must be paid regardless of whether they represent a burden or not to an impoverished and colonized society. Paul seems not to be bothered by this reality, and his declaration legitimates the socio-economic policies upon which the empire based its success and power.

²³ Cranfield, 668-669.

²⁴ He uses the present indicative of the verb, which presupposes that the Romans are doing so. It could also be a rhetorical strategy to invite them to do so.

²⁵ Fitzmyer, 670; Murray, 156; Alford, 448.

²⁶ Uwe Wegner, in his "Romanos 13:1-7: Los cristianos y las autoridades," *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana*, 4 (1989), 83-90.

7. Submission to earthly rulers is part of "the debts" Christians must pay to their neighbors out of respect and love (v. 7-8ff). It is a way of honoring the second most important commandment in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Lev 19:18). Christian responsibility towards the government, however, has an eschatological outlook (13:11-14). It is part of their duty before God finally establishes his kingdom. For Paul, the present ethics is influenced by a futuristic outlook. One could only wonder if Paul's exhortation would be different if Jesus' *parousia* was not imminent or would not happen at all.

V. Building a Hermeneutical Bridge: The Case of Illegal Immigration.

Because Romans 13:1-7 is a complicated crossbreed of politics, economics, sociology, ethics, and religion,²⁷ we simply cannot read this text with simplistic patriotic, spiritualistic eyes. Once we do that, several questions and issues arise.

1. Stating that all authority is "divine" in origin - without explanations or qualifications - rules out the complex processes societies undergo, create, and maintain hierarchies, how power differentials come into being, and how privileges are allocated unevenly. In the study of the Bible and our social reality, there are important variables to wrestle with before we bring God into the picture: the history of the state; theories of government (its nature, types, goals, and functions); the exercise of power (how decisions are made, on what basis, who benefits from those decisions, etc.); lawmaking and enforcement; sanctions; etc. As Americans, we must ask ourselves if God is the effective cause behind a system of government whose function is to create and enforce the rules for

²⁷ Wegner (83-107) approaches this passage from these angles, but he falls short on the implications from this text.

Capitalism to develop (including immigration laws), or whether the same God is establishing totalitarian regimes, monarchies, socialist states or theocracies.

If claiming that earthly rulers are “God’s appointees” is dangerous, attributing the honorific titles such as “servants of God” is more problematic. It adds to the problem of theodicy. In any regime, rulers could well act like “servants of the evil one,” and God would be “responsible” in some ways. From Paul’s time throughout the Middle Ages, we have seen kings who saw themselves as “representatives of God” or “the incarnation of the deity” and justified their right to rule and impunity. If what Paul says is true, what “kind of God” would earthly rulers be serving then? How and when are they accountable? Are the new bills to crack down illegal immigration the embodiment of “God’s will,” particularly the ones that re-label “hospitality” as “harboring criminals” and target primarily poor undocumented immigrants while exculpating employers and the Federal Government?

And what about the history and sociology of empires, which Paul or the Bible ignores? Romans 13;1-7 is not said in a vacuum. It must be studied paying close attention to economics, politics, and the prevailing ideology that justified it.²⁸ Powerfully influenced by a political culture, Americans tend to read biblical passages assuming that our system is divinely-endorsed but ignoring facts that question such an assumption. Many still believe that the U.S. is “the best country God has ever created,” and that our destiny is “to bless” the world and push “democracy” down people’s throats. What we oftentimes forget is that we have been sustaining “the U.S. Empire” with our unconditional compliance to the rule of law, naiveté, and indifference, coupled with our lack of self-critique and prophetic

²⁸ Néstor O. Míguez, “El imperio y los pobres en el tiempo neotestamentario,” *Revista de Interpretación bíblica latinoamericana*, 5-6 (1990), 97-101.

stance. Migrations are historical phenomena that cannot be fully understood unless we place them in the context of imperialism.

2. If opposition to authorities literally means "resisting God's appointees," there would seem to be no place for dissent, protests, economic boycotts, civil disobedience or even justifiable violence as a last resort, particularly in contexts for which there are no legal provisions for many of these courses of action. Without these options, marginalized communities would be doomed to endure pain, accept the leftovers that the government offers meanwhile, and pray and fast until God intervenes on their behalf, as Paul suggests. But if we did this, wouldn't we be sanctifying power disparities that keep a lot of people at the fringes of society as we open the doors for more "divinely-sanctioned" abuses?

It is mind-troubling that even people who advocate blind obedience to the government on religious basis are the same ones who would take arms against repressive regimes or retaliate, like we did in Afganistan and Irak. Didn't 'God' establish those governments? So on what basis do we go to war to overthrow radical, Muslim regimes? Paul's argument could easily give power-hungry politicians or head of states an opportunity to oppress with impunity, while they justify themselves arguing that "God" established them and demanding obedience of their victimized citizens. The unqualified straightforwardness with which the apostle approaches this theme is dangerous and lends itself to self-deceit, self-perpetuation and legitimation, manipulation of the masses, and blind conformity to the rule of law. Such theology would simply help institutionalize dehumanization. Earthly forms of government are finite, temporary, and sinful.

3. In an ideal situation, one would expect for governments "to punish evil" and "reward good behavior." And yet, states do not always do this consistently. Many times the evil ones are rewarded. Now, if it is not the people, humanitarian, or grass-roots groups who hold authorities accountable to the principle of fairness, compassion,

and integrity, who will? What is “good” and what is “bad”, who makes the difference between the two and on what basis? In this Post-modern society, common good is not always that common, sought after or enforced; good and evil are confused. Furthermore, many times good, innocent people or those who do what is morally right (but perhaps illegal), are punished, while the bad guys are not punished, go free or are even rewarded. One thing is true, though. You can still violate the law, pay for it, and use this as a testimony to change unjust laws, as Martin Luther King Jr. taught us. What is illegal is not necessarily immoral, and what is moral is not necessarily legal. Given the length, form, context, and intent of Romans 13:1-7, this passage is not about the full nature and function of the state, much less about the process of law-making and its enforcement.

4. Contrary to Paul’s ideals, many people “fear” the government regardless of whether intimidation is intended or not. Because of their state of vulnerability before the law, this is the daily life experience of poor immigrants who live in the shadows of society. Top-down governments operate on the basis of fear and so do democracies although in more subtle ways (raids, police force, national guards, paramilitary groups, etc.). Take, for example, what we have done to prisoners in Guantanamo Bay by not bringing charges against them and showing posters of Saddam Hussein’s execution as “an intellectual encouragement” to cooperate. State terrorism is common, but do not forget democratic tyranny. In addition, seeking to restore or maintain order, governments use their “weapons” to injure or kill the innocent – often referred to as “collateral damages,” “accidents,” “human error,” etc. In this sort of environment, people live in constant fear regardless of Paul’s affirmation.

Moreover, because “conscience” and “fear” are part of the human experience across space, time, and culture, they are powerfully influenced by the surrounding environment. Feelings and sense of responsibility are social constructs. In situations of crisis, civil disobedience and attempts to overthrow abusive regimes are actions that emerge out of true, honest, commitment, and moral conscience.

For this reason, as an ultimate resort, some Christians have had a different take on what Paul is saying on what is ethical and what is not. His words are context-bound and limited. Besides their own safety, freedom fighters fear for the wellbeing of others, and their conscience tells them to resist or oppose abuses of power. There is so much abuse people can take; submission does not last forever. What must the church do then?

5. According to Paul, "God" has appointed the state to collect taxes. This is not a statement to be taken lightly or disconnected from the larger world under Roman imperialism. Socio-politically, Paul's statement justifies a socio-economic system based on the exploitation of slaves and peasants. All empires are built and maintained on the basis of control and wealth. Thus, to bring God into the picture with no comments is disconcerting and make God "an accomplice" or "the cause" of imperialism. But is it God's business to bless tributary policies? What kind of God would this be? A God created in the image and likeness of a pre-advanced, industrial society run by the strongest and fittest? What do we make of governments that use our tax moneys to build weapons and invade and control other nations, instead of using these resources to fix our outdated, broken immigration system and improve childcare, health, education, housing, jobs, food, helping the poor, and providing humanitarian help abroad? Does God want for the poor to pay taxes to impoverish themselves even more? What would we say about undocumented immigrants whose taxes are taken from the pay checks and are neglected benefits while the wages of others are withheld? Is God behind our government, laws, and economic system? Without a critical reflection beyond the boundaries of biblical passages, our theology blesses Capitalism and Globalization, systems that are responsible for the recycling of poverty in the world and the waves of migrations across our borders.

6. It is easy to ask for submission from a situation of comfort or when the rule of relatively law works for us. Since the arrival of our ancestors to this land, we have grown to appreciate and live by values such as popular consent, sovereignty, majority rule, individualism,

equality, freedom, and the creation of a civil society. Upon this foundation, the U.S. government has created conditions for relative social progress. From this vantage point, who would have a problem submitting to the state? Why would you defy such a system? Conversely, why asking people who live in dehumanizing conditions to submit to a government that has caused their misery? Why stay on the other side of the border, when their own government is corrupt and oppressive?

If reciprocity is an alternative model of social interaction, why adopt word-by-word the colonialist model presupposed in Romans 13:1-7? Or worse, why bring God to legitimate such a model? As a matter of fairness, one would also expect Paul to have addressed the government directly and make sure they do their part as God holds them responsible for their actions. But he did not. History has taught us that “keeping the peace” at all cost is not always the best or only option for changes to take place. Oppressors do not change their ways unless you force them. In a context in which mutual responsibilities leading to the welfare of everybody, the state has a responsibility towards its citizens too. Respect and honor are not the responsibilities of citizens only, like Paul asserts. In simply focusing on what Christians in Rome must do, Paul leaves this important area out.

7. There is no question that the commandment to love our neighbors as a way of expressing our love for God is the most important principle of Christian ethics. Paul’s metaphor is powerful: Love is a debt! And yet, the government is not the only or most important neighbor we have. The subjects of the state are our neighbors too, and people always take priority over institutions or structures, especially persons whose suffering, scarcity, and marginalization perpetuate the happiness, abundance, and position of privilege of the elite and the system that victimizes the majority. Are we not called to pay to these neighbors what we owe, namely, our love as expressed in pleas for justice? Again, Paul’s injunction falls short and further victimizes his readers, other Christians, and the inhabitants in the Greco-Roman living under “the blessing” and “curse” of the *pax*

romana. Don't we become accomplices of Paul's shortcoming when we approach the immigration debate today taking the blessing and curse of "*the pax Americana*" for granted and ruling out our role in forcing immigrants to come here?

Put in its socio-historical context, Romans 13:1-7 is *not* about immigration, immigration laws or obedience to them, and because of it, it is dangerous to *transplant* it to our own social context literally. Again, our challenges are complex, multidimensional, and potentially dangerous when we do not engage in critical thinking. The assumptions Paul is operating under are far from being the principles of handbook on political science, law, economics, ethics, homeland security or immigration. However, all the above considerations serve as a point of reference or cognitive mat upon which to lay migrations, the nature and function of immigration laws and the role of the state therein.

To argue that immigration laws and the governments that enact them fell "from heaven" is to minimize their *immanence*, namely, that they are constructs emerging out of a multifaceted complex social system. Laws are typically created by the rich, the powerful, and selected races or ethnic groups to protect primarily their position of privilege and interests. Raising visa application fees to 80 %, as President Bush recently proposed, obviously hurts, not people who can afford it. The same thing occurs with the enforcement of immigration laws. Raids targeting immigrants and massive deportations up-rooting families are not really equivalent sanctions to the penalties applied to illegal employers. Fining them inconsistently does not really take into account the power differentials between those two groups. Not only do those at the margins have no say on the design of the laws, but they are also the primary victims of their enforcement because of their position of vulnerability before the law and despite what the Constitution declares. As with ethnic minorities, immigrants are preys of institutionalized and popular aggression.

The anti-migratory sentiments this past year show that many of the state laws or county ordinances victimized the poor, women, and

children. And this situation makes us question whether God is behind this or if public officials are 'God's servants.' When higher education is denied to young undocumented immigrants as a way of holding them responsible for the illegal behavior of their parents we practice escapegoating of the worse kind ("guilt by association"). There is something terribly dehumanizing about barring undocumented immigrants from access to education and health care, even though many pay taxes to help subsidize those services and support our economy with their hard labor. And is God involved in legislation seeking to criminalize humanitarian help, penalize poor immigrants families who send remittances to counteract poverty in their countries, or strip U.S. citizenship away from the children of undocumented immigrants?

For many Christians, it seems like it would be "right" to stay and die from starvation on the other side border because God has established the corrupt government that has impoverished them. It would also be "right" not to cross the U.S. border illegally because God has set our laws to protect Americans. However, isn't God supposed to be on the side of the poor, foreigners, widows, and children? Paradoxically, the government that designs the laws to protect its borders is the same government that has helped create conditions that have forced people to emigrate. Take, for example, the waves of migrations from Central America (Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) during the Reagan administrations in the 1980's, which supported brutal dictatorships and civil wars as a way of counteracting Communism.

Globalization (a euphemism for the neo-liberal, recycling, strategies of Capitalism) is not innocent on this matter either. Migrations are not just isolated events; they take place in the context of a larger socio-economic reality.²⁹ The Braceros Program between 1942

²⁹ Orlando O. Espín, "Immigration and Theology: Reflections by an Implicated Theologian," *Perspectivas: Occasional Papers*, Rubén Rosario

and 1965, the American labor demand and Mexican labor supply between 1965 and 1986, and the North American Free Trade Agreement implemented in 1993 have contributed to migrations as well.³⁰ Given these circumstances, advocates for obedience to “U.S. Immigration Laws” have the audacity to assume that these laws are “divinely-ordained” and that it is our responsibility to enforce them, just like that. Because of supply-demand disparities, there are not enough employment visas for the 150,000 people who come here “illegally” every year.

The state is necessary. Law is central to social order, meaning, and survival. But there is much more to the state or legislation than “fear” as the main motivation and strong sanctions against “bad behavior.” In addition to making sense and being relevant, the law needs to reflect God’s highest values, namely, a perfectible manifestation of justice and love, not a weapon for repressed frustration or tool in service of a few and the system that privileges them. Laws must not be implemented arbitrarily or selectively. There are good laws and bad laws, just like there are good enforcement and bad enforcement. And once a distinction has been made, we must neither support lawlessness or anarchy, nor blind subordination and obedience to the state and its laws at all cost. Laws and their enforcement are not above justice, but neither are bureaucrats and their machinery.

A sound Christian attitude towards the immigration controversy involves asking the right questions and going beyond what biblical texts say: What is the history and nature of our American government? How are Federal laws related to state laws? Are immigration laws and current bills just and fair? What social or moral values do laws reflect and defend? Should we obey or enforce laws that are immoral or that

Rodríguez, ed. (Princeton, N.Y.: The Hispanic Theological Initiative, Fall 2006), vol 10, 40-45.

³⁰ Patricia Fernández-Kelly, “To Welcome the Stranger: The Myths and Realities of Illegal Immigration,” *Perspectivas*, 11-16.

go against God's laws? Has God "really" established them? Does our government apply the law equally? Are they designed for "the common good"? Is the application of sanctions against illegal employers and illegal immigrants qualitatively and quantitatively equivalent? What is right and wrong in the immigration controversy and what basis can we tell the difference? Are we using our position of privilege as Americans to create conditions of love and fairness here and abroad, particularly though our international policies?

There is no question that the Bible prioritizes obedience to "God's laws." It also encourages us to love, serve, and seek justice for our brothers and sisters who suffer the most; this includes foreigners or strangers, legal or not.³¹ Jesus set an example with his radical message and lifestyle, which we must take at higher levels.³² So to articulate a rigid and/or superficial Christian position against illegal immigration dishonors these teachings and solves nothing. Paul's brief comments are far from being a theology of Christian responsibility towards the state and its civil or criminal laws, much less being principles of absolute, universal, applicability on immigration or other matters. In fact, his comments raise more questions than provide us with answers. Complex situations require multifaceted solutions to which Christian can and must add important inputs. Yet, we have to do it right, always remembering earthly loyalties vanish before our "heavenly citizenship" (Col 3:3; Phil 3:20) and borderless identity in Christ Jesus (Mat 25:31-46; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:11-22). As we consider all ponder all the above comments, let's not forget that confessing Jesus is Lord and Savior is

³¹ Luis R. Rivera-Rodríguez, "Immigration and the Bible: Comments by a Diasporic Theologian," *Perspectivas*, 23-36.

³² See my articles "Jesus, the Immigrant Child: A Diasporic Reading of Matthew 2:1-23," *Apuntes* 26, no3 (Fall, 2006), 84-114; "On Sheep and Goats: The Treatment of Foreigners According to Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46)" in *The Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* (forthcoming).

our main epistemological tenet; only to him do we owe ultimate loyalty.

SUMMARY

In response to Christians who have used Romans 13:1-7 to encourage the church to submit to earthly rulers and their laws (particularly immigration laws) on the basis that they have been established by God, this article argues that such an approach is superficial and lacks critical thinking. Not only does it not take into account several issues and gaps, which Paul's words leave out, but it also ignores the complexities of our own context. After briefly putting Romans 13:1-7 in context and summarizing its main arguments, the author asks some questions and raises some issues we must consider, as part of our effort to build a hermeneutical bridge, particularly with respect to "illegal immigration."

Book Review

Johnson, Maxwell E. *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflection of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*. (Lanham - Boulder - New York - Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002)

Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez

This is a much welcome and creative work from a Protestant theologian that breaks our idoloclastic and iconoclastic tradition --which has prevented us from better historicizing and materializing our faith. This essay, which is pedagogic in nature, targets mainly Anglo or non-Mexican-American Latinos readers. Thus, the author provides some detailed historical data that might be common knowledge for Hispanics of Mexican origin.

Paraphrasing Jesus' dictum we can state: "Pay to Mary what belongs to Mary, and pay to God what belongs to God." Unfortunately, Johnson's strong dependence on Virgilio Elizondo works leads him to subscribe to some naive theological formulations that magnify Mary's role. Elizondo's high Mariology links Mary's work with soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and Christology, ending up in a superfluous Jesus Christ or Holy Spirit, or the affirmation of a "Holy Quaternity" with Mary as the fourth person. The "Ever-Virgin," "Mater Inviolata," "Regina Coeli," docetic, ahistorical, desexualized Mary portrayed by Elizondo's romantic approach takes its distance from a low and popular Mariology.

One might argue for an alternate tribute to Mary instead, one that needs to be undertaken under a theological gynecology-anthropology. Thus, one should honor Mary for what she was: a magnificent female human being committed to advance the values of the Reign of God. However, Johnson and Elizondo's high Mariology deny a Mariology from below at two points. On one side they lack a social analysis of Hispanics in the USA. On the other side they are not intentional in listening to the audacity of popular religion hermeneutics.

Johnson pays some attention to popular wisdom and quotes Martin Luther's commentary on the Magnificat, "the centerpiece of Luther's Marian views," as well.

Nevertheless, Johnson does not stress adequately their liberating elements: Mary's cry for feeding the hungry, of being undocumented in Egypt, of raising her prophetic voice against the rich, of being a single mother, a prostitute initiated by Panthera the Roman soldier rapist, etc. Happily at some point, Johnson confess that there is no point in worshipping Mary's image but our task is to side with the despised of society.

Johnson agrees that the hybrid Guadalupe is a mariophony who can very well be the new symbol not only for Roman Catholic Hispanics but for the church at large. In the Hispanic milieu, this represents some problems: the uniformization is the denial to the essence of catholicity. The supposedly all-embracing ideology of mestizaje is a biological category to whitening the race through the de-Indianization and de-Africanization, but it is also a political category. The globalization of Guadalupe runs the risk of being a camouflage for religious fundamentalism.

Johnson most striking contribution is his revisiting Orlando Espín's intuition (84 ff) of reflecting on Guadalupe from the pneumatological rather than mariological level. Guadalupe is not a mariophony, She is the discovery of the ancient Christian tradition of conceiving the Holy Spirit as a She, the "Giver of live." This doctrine that takes back the feminine dimension of God through the Holy Spirit should be developed to the point of discovering as many "Pneumaphonies" as necessary in order to honor each culture. For instance, here in Puerto Rico, a contemporary autochthonous spirituality which has had a considerably impact is the Mita movement. A woman who left the Pentecostal church and openly declared to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit!

What Johnson and Espin are actually doing is to reclaim the long Syrian, Ethiopian, Moravian, Wesleyan tradition which keeps alive the feminine face of God, through the Holy Spirit as a She (Isaiah 66.13, John 14.26). Thanks to Guadalupe —just one avocation of the Holy Spirit— Spirit, feminine in Hebrew, neuter in Greek, masculine in Latin, and now feminine again in Spanish with la lady de Guadalupe!

Book Review

Espín, Orlando O. *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections Because of Culture*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2007, 145 pages.

Alberto Garcia

Professor Espín, professor of systematic theology at the University of San Diego, is well known for his contributions to the study of Latina/o popular religion and the tradition of the church. While these collections of five essays are written from his location as a U.S. Latino Roman Catholic theologian, they nevertheless offer important themes and reflections for an intercultural dialogue for the church catolic, i.e. all Christian traditions.

The first essay is directed to the construction of an intercultural theology of Catholic tradition. This is a theme that escapes many protestant and evangelical latina/o theologians in their theological work. I am painfully aware as a catholic evangelical theologian (Lutheran) that tradition is a very important foundation for our theological work. Espín affirms that Catholic tradition is a collective present interpretation of the past in reference to the future (p.3). The Catholic community serves as a mediator of that past in that it serves as the present memory of that past in our walk toward the future. He finds continuity in the tradition in that the same community is the one that authenticates the tradition not necessarily in the sensed present

coherence but rather in the experience of faith. He engages in this light in an intercultural dialogue with the seemingly contradictory themes of the particularity and universality of the tradition in our global village. Here he finds the absence of traditional Roman Catholic constructive work on tradition taking into their reflections the particularity, the Signs and Symbols, of particular and popular Catholic tradition in the catholicity of the church. He finds Catholic tradition succumbing in this manner to the current process of homogeneous and hegemonic globalization. Here the big fish of universality shallows the little minnows' particularities and contribution to the process of life and society.

Espín is influenced by the intercultural philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt in his constructive work toward an intercultural theology of Catholic tradition. The method of inculturation has been predominant in the reading of the tradition. This methodology pursues knowledge of culture and truth from an established canon or universal perspective. Espín prefers an "intertransculturation" methodology where truth is discovered in a "convivir," a prolong living together of people, and communities. Espín argues here against first world "foundationalism" where one worldview or perspective is supreme and against postmodern relativism where each community is closed to the reality of the other. The second view in essence may lead also to the predominance of the most powerful culture. He incorporates also Ellacuría observation that culture is historical and therefore emerges also from an internal conflict of currents. In essence, truth is found in the intercultural dialogue of people with equal respect to each person' or community. The political, economic, social and gender themes are important consideration for this intercultural dialog. Espín finds this intercultural methodology very achievable within the Catholic tradition by following Walther Kasper. Kasper understands that the universality of the Catholic Church consists of local churches. An intertranscultural dialog needs to take place among the church communities to affirm the true universal catholicity of the church. Interculturality, therefore, is a key hermeneutical principle to allow each community to look anew at

the tradition in solidarity with the other communities in order to renew the presence and identity of the church in the future.

The second essay is a constructive intercultural proposal toward a theological anthropology of Catholic tradition. Espín prefers to order his study with the question "Who are human persons?" rather than with the question "What is a human person?" He engages the reader in a discussion of "*humanitas*." This term identifies the most "crucial of theological anthropological questions" (p.52). Our humanity is not found or located in some abstract concept but rather in our living, historical and complex reality. Therefore *humanitas* exists only in the "living, dynamic intersection of real life diverse contextualizations" (53). It does not exist apart from this interconnectivity and contextualization. Consequently, our identities (individual and communal) are those very historical and real life contextualizations. This is why Espín prefers to be guided by the question of "Who is a human person?" rather than by the abstract question "What is a human person?" This questioning permits us to face squarely issues of hegemony, and power asymmetries. Espín engages the reader then, in a reflection of the *humanitas* of Latino/a and Blacks LGBT (lesbian, gay, black and transgender) communities. He argues then for the dignity of these communities underscoring that their *humanitas* is dependent also on their sexual orientation and that contemporary biblical exegesis cannot allow the condemnation of homosexuality as it is practiced today. He provides at the end of this essay an eye opening appendix concerning recent statistics (2006) of abuse and discrimination directed to LGBT communities. There could be a difference for the sake of human dignity if we take people and communities in the context of their living rather than in our abstract perception of what it means to be human.

The third essay is a proposal for a Latino/a theology of religions. Espín engages in this essay in a dialog with the Lukumí non-Christian African religion, an important religious tradition in the Caribbean, Panamá, Brazil, and among U.S. Latinos. He continues and deepens the dialog in his fourth essay. He considers three important

factors toward a construction of a theology of religions. A Latina/o theology of religions is foremost a Christian reflection on the meaning and actions of God's grace in human religions, societies, and with individuals. Because it is an attempt to understand God's love and providence within non-Christian contexts, a theology of religions is ultimately for the benefit of Christian self-understanding. Consequently, the main non-negotiable principle in this constructive work is God's mercy and compassion toward all people regardless who they are or their condition in life. Espín offers at this point a good summary and introduction to key principles within the Lukumí religion that originated from the Yoruba region of Western Africa. The concept of ashé, as principle of life is the key component in the Lukumí religion. The concepts of sin, salvation and redemption, in Espín's perception, do not play a part in this religion.

The fifth essay is a very valuable essay not only for Roman Catholics but also for protestants and evangelicals. The fact is, as Espín observes, that popular Catholicism is an identifiable bench mark of the Latin American Catholic Church. Also, half of the world and U.S. Roman Catholics population are Latino/as. Popular Catholicism is an ever present reality for our theological and pastoral reflection. Espín traces the contributions of the Latin American Episcopal Councils (CELAM) of Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992) toward a recognition and acceptance of popular Catholicism in Latin American and the Caribbean. Medellín offers for the first time a respectful study of the Catholic people's religion. It is, however, the only one of the documents that requested a systematic study of the religion. Espín observes also the imprecise language of these three episcopate documents in their definition of popular Catholicism. They use the terms popular religion, popular religiosity, and popular piety interchangeably. He finds, in spite of this confusion, that the Puebla document is the one that examines more closely popular Catholicism. Nevertheless, neither Puebla nor Santo Domingo offer a systematic theological reflection of popular Catholicism. These two documents in fact create a further ditch between pastoral work and theological reflection in the appropriation of popular Catholicism. Espín clarifies

also in this article, rightly so, that it is important to make a distinction between popular religion and popular Catholicism in our Latino/a contexts. There exists in our midst non-Christian religions among the poor. A case in point is the Lukumí religion. Medellín made mention of indigenous native populations but ignored the Afro-Latin American religions, which constitute one third of the continents population. Puebla only acknowledges the Afro-Latin population in passim and does not reflect on this important segment of the population. It was only the Santo Domingo episcopal document that finally pays attention to this segment of the population. It affirms Afro-Latin population's struggles for justice. The Santo Domingo conclusion calls for an interreligious dialogue with the Afro-Latin religions and calls them "seeds of the Word" (p.137).

These collections of essays offer important constructive theological reflections for our incarnational presence and theological work among Latino/a in the U.S., the Caribbean, and Latin America. It calls for a serious reflection of the role of tradition as a vehicle of futuring our present in light of our past. Espín perspective on Christian anthropology in light of the question "Who are human persons?" is essential to listen to the silence voices of the LGBT and non-Christian religion communities. Often we have by passed or ignored or worst injured with sins of omission and commission these human beings who live in our midst. They are people of flesh and blood, children of the same God. His reflection on the CELAM documents is important also for protestant theologians in considering the themes of popular religion and popular Catholicism. It calls us to an intercultural dialogue in light of these themes.

At the same time, I find some lacunae in this book that the author may want to consider in the future. I was surprised that he did not draw from the rich tradition of Saint Ireneus concerning catholicity. Justo L. González has drawn richly from this tradition. "*Katholikos*" means etymologically speaking "according to the whole." Ireneus understood his witness as "catholic" because he did not conformed to a single witness but to the witness of the "entire catholic church." The parts make the whole and not viceversa. This is a powerful witness to

consider the relationship of the particular to the universal. Also, Espín ignores the important Christian tradition of the protestant/evangelical world. It would be well for the author to consider especially the catholic evangelical tradition. This tradition affirms the church in the faith of the people assembled as living communities and not in ceremonies nor structures. This is not a platonic faith but a faith that lives within a sacramental reality in community. First Corinthians 11 is an indication of the faith of the people in that it is incarnational, contextual, and inclusive toward others. The Catholicity with capital C, must include the living tradition and the faith of the catholic/evangelical communities. We may be exiles but we are still sisters and brothers in Christ, futuring in our present the incarnational reality of the Gospel. On another note, the issue of sexuality is always a very divisive topic. However, it needs to be said that it is a thorny problem in Latino/a communities. The image of a macho man hunting after his prey is a source of oppression. Espín should have suggested also in the need for dialog the construction of a sexual ethics that takes into account the denial of the other because of our sexual needs and desires. This is an important topic for exploration in the context of our communities. Also, I find the dimension of guilt a real issue within Afro-Latino religions. In my pastoral work, I have counseled Afro-Latino/a believers divided within and without in relationship to their ancestral communities. Guilt has been a real problem in their psyche. In light of this experience, I believe that the dimension of sin in relationship to guilt bears more in depth phenomenological study in this interreligious dialogue with non-Christian African religions. Again, we owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Orlando O. Espín for his provocative and in depth theological reflections on grace and humanness *because of culture*. His insightful, prophetic boldness, and passion for the faith of the people are to be commended.

Reseña de Libro

Rodríguez Sánchez, Jesús, David Hernández Lozano y Héctor E. López Sierra (eds.). *La fe cristiana en búsqueda de nuevos entendimientos. Una introducción al estudio del cristianismo*. 2^{da} edición. México: Thomson Learning, 2005.

Pablo R. Caraballo-Rodríguez

Esta segunda edición del libro contiene 8 capítulos distribuidos en 280 páginas. Cada capítulo tiene una recomendación bibliográfica, un glosario, actividades y evaluación para los estudiantes, y una recomendación de páginas *En la red*. Además tiene una sección para profundizar los temas y *Casos de estudio* para la discusión en clase y/o asignadas para análisis y reflexión.^[1]

El *capítulo 1* nos presenta una mirada panorámica del surgimiento y desarrollo de la universidad, y su relación con la enseñanza de la religión. Se destaca la participación de la iglesia cristiana en el surgimiento de las universidades. Se añaden datos acerca de los desarrollos actuales de las universidades y algunas características de la universidad posmoderna. La autora lanza una crítica, que algunos/as dirán: ¡“Bien merecida”!, al control que tienen los hombres de las estructuras de la universidad. Un aporte significativo es la presentación de los programas de estudio del grado asociado y de bachillerato en Artes y Religión y del doctorado en Filosofía en Estudios Teológicos. Esta sección es útil para la promoción del programa; además ofrece una idea al estudiantado acerca del estudio de la religión en la universidad como una disciplina académica.

La segunda edición del libro —a diferencia de la primera— incluye un capítulo titulado *La fe cristiana y la teología* (Cap. 2). En el mismo se abordan los temas fundamentales de la teología cristiana. Un libro introductorio acerca de la fe cristiana no podía dejar de abordar los temas teológicos que la religión e iglesia cristiana ha discutido a través de su historia. En el mismo se abordan algunos datos acerca de la

doctrina de Dios, la cristología, la Biblia como fuente esencial para la teología cristiana, la soteriología, la escatología; algunos datos acerca del ecumenismo, entre otros temas. Ahora, nada se dice acerca de la relación de los temas de la teología cristiana con los Credos de la Iglesia (Credo Apostólico y Credo Niceno). Aparte de lo mencionado en el tema del Dios-Trino, hecho de menos el tema de la pneumatología. Tema de mucha importancia para la tradición y la doctrina cristiana, y en particular para la tradición pentecostal.

El *capítulo 3* del libro aborda el tema de la Biblia con el título *La fe cristiana y la Biblia*. Ciertamente, en ésta edición (2^{da}) tenemos una versión mejorada, al añadir temas que no aparecen en la primera edición del libro. Se incluyen recuadros acerca de los idiomas bíblicos (hebreo y arameo para el Antiguo Testamento; griego del Nuevo Testamento; latín de la Vulgata Latina), un estudio amplio y actualizado de las versiones bíblicas (católicas, protestantes y ecuménicas). En la primera edición del libro el tema de la Biblia se limitó a tratar asuntos del Antiguo Testamento (Hebreo, Griego, Vulgata Latina) y en cuanto al Nuevo Testamento sólo se trataron asuntos relacionados a los evangelios canónicos. El autor de este capítulo de la segunda edición añade un estudio de las cartas de Pablo y de las Cartas Generales y un estudio del libro de Apocalipsis con una sección (*A profundidad*) acerca del género Apocalipsis y sus características literarias. También se incluye información acerca de los criterios de canonicidad e información actualizada acerca de la interpretación de la Biblia que están ausentes en la primera edición del libro. Este capítulo es un buen resumen de la historia del canon bíblico.

En el *capítulo 4* ya entramos al tema de *Jesucristo y la fe cristiana*. En la sección *Jesús y sus circunstancias* la autora toma la información de la primera edición del libro. Se incluye en la segunda edición la *Situación socioeconómica y religiosa en los tiempos de Jesús*. En este capítulo encontramos una explicación de las *Tres etapas en la formación de los evangelios* y una *breve introducción del contenido de los evangelios canónicos*. Hecho de menos una presentación del tema de los *milagros y las parábolas de Jesús* que

aparecen en la primera edición del libro. Pienso que esto es importante para presentar y explicar el significado de las características de la misión de Jesús de Nazaret según nos lo presenta Mateo (Jesús enseña en las sinagogas, predica la buena noticia del reino de Dios y sana a las gentes de toda enfermedad y dolencia [EvMt 4:23 (cf. 9:35; EvMc 1:39)]). Esta información también es útil para explicar lo que la autora menciona en la sección *Muerte y resurrección de Jesús, el Cristo* y que lee como sigue: “La muerte de Jesús no se produjo por casualidad, ese fue el precio que tuvo que pagar por su vida y su ministerio”. Es obvio en la lectura de los evangelios la descripción que hacen los evangelistas del ministerio de Jesús y que parte de ese ministerio fue enseñar en parábolas y obrar milagros entre las gentes. Es extraordinaria la inclusión en la sección *Caso de estudio* de la tabla sinóptica para comparar la película *La pasión de Cristo* de Mel Gibson. Los estudiantes y también los profesores se beneficiarán de este recurso para el análisis de la película. Para una próxima edición se puede añadir una *Cronología de la vida de Jesús de Nazaret* e información acerca de los *relatos de vocaciones presente en los evangelios canónicos* por la importancia que tiene el señalar que Jesús fue acompañado en su ministerio a Israel por discípulos (y también por discípulas).

Otro capítulo que se incluye en el libro es el que lleva por título *La fe cristiana y la ética* (cap. 5). En este capítulo se presenta todo un panorama de la ética cristiana. Este capítulo es muy útil para introducir al estudiantado al tema de la ética que luego abordará en el curso *Dimensiones Éticas de Asuntos Contemporáneos*. Al mismo tiempo los estudiantes adquieren una visión de lo que es la ética cristiana. Para aquellos que ya tomaron el curso de *Fe Cristiana* este capítulo puede ser una lectura complementaria del curso *Dimensiones Éticas*. Ahora, hecho de menos unas “pinceladas” acerca de la ética de Jesús y un ejercicio de lectura del Sermón del Monte (EvMt 5-7) para llevarlo a cabo con los estudiantes. Esta información explicaría el comentario hecho por el autor que lee: “Sin Jesucristo no hay ética cristiana ya que sus enseñanzas y, sobre todo, su praxis salvadora, son las que sirven de brújula y de faro orientador a quien se considera discípulo del Maestro de Galilea”. Además se puede considerar el relacionar el tema del Jesús

histórico y el de la Ética de Jesús. Para esto, se puede tomar el *Caso de estudio* que se presenta en este capítulo con el tema *Cuando la Iglesia se convierte en ramera* y se puede comparar con una cita del teólogo Juan José Tamayo Acosta de su libro *Por eso lo mataron. El horizonte ético de Jesús de Nazaret* que lee como sigue:

“La muerte de Jesús se enmarca en el mismo *horizonte ético* en que aconteció su vida. Hay una relación de causa y efecto entre el tipo de vida que llevó y el desenlace final de su itinerario vital. Su muerte es consecuencia de su actitud transgresora de la ley, de su crítica de la religión, de su permanente actitud conflictiva frente a las autoridades religiosas y políticas; es consecuencia, en definitiva, de su existencia libre y de su forma liberadora de actuar... La práctica liberadora de Jesús era socialmente revolucionaria, porque defendía y practicaba un estilo de vida comunal; políticamente peligrosa, porque desacralizaba el poder y presentaba como alternativa el servicio; religiosamente subversiva, porque eliminaba a los intermediarios —bien fueran personas constituidas en autoridad, bien instituciones revestidas de sacralidad— para acceder a Dios. Ahí es donde adquiere significación su vida y sentido su muerte.”^[2]

Una pregunta que se puede formular: ¿Qué similitudes y/o diferencias encontramos en la opción de vida y ministerio de Jesús de Nazaret y la del sacerdote Oscar Arnulfo Romero?

El capítulo 6 con el título *Del desencantamiento al reencantamiento del mundo: fe cristiana, ciencias y tecnologías*, a mi entender, es una versión mejorada y actualizada del capítulo 2 de la primera edición del libro. Este capítulo trabaja el diálogo entre las ciencias, las tecnologías y la religión. Pienso que está mejor estructurado y sus secciones *A profundidad* amplían la información suministrada en la primera edición del libro. Las actividades recomendadas son extraordinarias para trabajarlas con los estudiantes. Tengo que mencionar que este capítulo es el más árido del libro, mas

no imposible para estudiarlo. Poner a dialogar la religión, la fe cristiana, las ciencias y la tecnología, colocan el tema de la fe cristiana en la historia. Esto evidencia que las religiones y con ello la fe cristiana no nace ni se desarrollan en un vacío histórico.

El capítulo 7 *La fe cristiana y el pluralismo religioso* a mi entender es un estudio de religiones comparadas. En la segunda edición no se incluye el tema del ecumenismo que estuvo presente en la primera edición del libro. Los datos acerca del ecumenismo (aunque breves) los tenemos en el capítulo 2 de la segunda edición del libro. Creo que no incluir los datos del ecumenismo en este capítulo fue una cuestión estratégica para así presentar y abordar el tema del macroecumenismo. La propuesta del macroecumenismo es interesante para la discusión en clase ante la realidad del pluralismo religioso. El macroecumenismo desafía la práctica evangelístico-proselitista de la iglesia cristiana. A su vez, llama a un diálogo interreligioso donde los seres humanos, no importando su tradición religiosa, se ven como hermanos y hermanas que proceden de un mismo Dios Padre/Madre. Una teología teocéntrica es la base de la propuesta macroecuménica. Hay que verificar qué textos bíblicos nos presentan una teología teocéntrica y universalista para apoyar esta propuesta del macroecumenismo. Sería bueno realizar un ejercicio donde se escuche y analice la canción *No me llames extranjero* de Alberto Cortés y Facundo Cabral para enfatizar y recalcar el aspecto de la *hermandad humana* como clave hermenéutica para el macroecumenismo. También sería bueno incluir entre las actividades para los estudiantes algunas canciones (varias de ellas de *salsa*) que su lenguaje es uno que refleja o expresa las creencias de la *Santería afrocaribeña*.

El capítulo 8 del libro titulado *La fe cristiana, la pastoral y la universidad: el quehacer teológico en una universidad hispana, latinoamericana, caribeña y ecuménica* es una ampliación, y yo diría nuevo acercamiento, del epílogo que aparece en la primera edición del libro. Como yo lo veo, este es un capítulo para los profesores; son recomendaciones del tipo de relación e interacción que debe darse entre el profesor y el estudiante. El autor señala que los estudiantes llegan a

la universidad con una visión del mundo que está ligada a la religión aprendida. Partiendo del modelo teórico del desarrollo de la fe como un proceso formativo elaborado por John Westerhoff (*fe experiencial, fe afiliativa, fe investigativa y fe propia*), el autor nos señala que los estudiantes universitarios están en la etapa de la *Fe investigativa*. Ahora, pienso que la mayoría de nuestros estudiantes comienzan con una *Fe experiencial* como nos menciona el autor, pero dan un salto hacia la *Fe investigativa*. Digo esto porque la mayoría de nuestros estudiantes universitarios no asisten —y muchos nunca han asistido— a una iglesia y/o no participan de grupo religioso alguno. Por lo que no podemos hablar, en este caso, de una *Fe afiliativa*. Ahora, este modelo teórico del desarrollo de la fe como un proceso formativo puede ayudar al profesor a formular una serie de preguntas acerca de la experiencia religiosa del estudiantado. Como actividad con los estudiantes se puede elaborar un cuestionario con preguntas que nos informen acerca de la *experiencia religiosa de los estudiantes, su afiliación religiosa* (si alguna) *y las preguntas que desea le sean contestadas en el curso de Fe Cristiana*. Al final del curso ofrecer otro ejercicio donde el estudiante pueda expresar lo aprendido en clase y el impacto transformador o liberador —si alguno— que le produjo lo aprendido.

Este libro de texto es de suma importancia para un curso introductorio acerca de la religión cristiana, particularmente de la fe cristiana, según es entendida en el mundo occidental. El libro también puede ser utilizado por profesores de otras disciplinas académicas como lo son la psicología, la sociología, la historia, ciencias políticas y económicas, que deseen hacer alguna referencia a las enseñanzas de la iglesia cristiana y la fe cristiana.

[1] Esta es una versión revisada de la presentación del libro que se llevó a cabo en la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Recinto de San Germán el 26 de octubre de 2005.

[2] Juan J. Tamayo Acosta, *Por eso lo mataron. El horizonte ético de Jesús de Nazaret* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), p.150-151.

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